

About Esophageal Cancer

Esophageal cancer forms in tissues lining the esophagus (the muscular tube through which food passes from the throat to the stomach). Two types of esophageal cancer are squamous cell carcinoma (cancer that begins in flat cells lining the esophagus) and adenocarcinoma (cancer that begins in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids).

Estimated new cases and deaths from esophageal cancer in the United States in 2017

New cases: 16,940

Deaths: 15,690

Esophageal cancer represents 2.6% of all cancer deaths in the U.S.

Risk factors include:

Age 65 or older, male, smoking, heavy drinking, diet, obesity

Acid reflux: Acid reflux is the abnormal backward flow of stomach acid into the esophagus. Reflux is very common. A symptom of reflux is heartburn, but some people do not have symptoms. The stomach acid can damage the tissue of the esophagus. After many years of reflux, this tissue damage may lead to adenocarcinoma of the esophagus in some people.

Barrett esophagus: Acid reflux may damage the esophagus and over time cause a condition known as Barrett esophagus. The cells in the lower part of the esophagus are abnormal. Most people who have Barrett esophagus do not know it. The presence of Barrett esophagus increases the risk of adenocarcinoma of the esophagus. It is a greater risk factor than acid reflux alone.

Symptoms:

Early esophageal cancer may not cause symptoms. As the cancer grows, the most common symptoms are:

- * Food gets stuck in the esophagus, and food may come back up
- * Pain when swallowing
- * Pain in the chest or back
- * Weight loss
- * Heartburn
- * A hoarse voice or cough that doesn't go away within 2 weeks

These symptoms may be caused by esophageal cancer or other health problems. If you have any of these symptoms, you should tell your doctor so that problems can be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

Treatment:

The options are surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy or a combination of these treatments.

The treatment that's right for you depends mainly on the following:

- * where the cancer is located within the esophagus
- * whether the cancer has invaded nearby structures
- * whether the cancer has spread to lymph nodes or other organs
- * your symptoms
- * your general health

Esophageal cancer is hard to control with current treatments. For that reason, many doctors encourage people with this disease to consider taking part in a clinical trial, a research study of new treatment methods.